

Formation in an Electronic Age¹

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A new challenge, particularly acute in the last five to ten years, is facing formators of seminarians, religious, and Catholic laity. Instead of being reinvigorated after times of relaxation and recreation, many seem more fatigued. Like a particle of light, which is difficult to catch directly, the fatigue is seen mainly by its effects. Some examples may include a reduced quality of study and prayer with an inability to concentrate after recreation. Or, if unexpected free time becomes available, it is often not used for study or prayer, but for more extensive relaxation and recreation.² In an unending circle after these times, these persons are again fatigued instead of being refreshed. They may attribute the cause of their fatigue to being asked to do too much work. Yet they do not become invigorated about choosing higher things.

What causes these cycles of fatigue? How can formators offer opportunities that foster personal growth and vocational development of so many young men and women of good will? Integration is a key to formation. Formation must strengthen in a person the deepest longings for union with God, and it must help them discover active means for achieving this union. This is a spiritual union; it is the goal of each human life and Christian vocation. Recent Church documents have emphasized integration and unity of life as key to all formation. Formation "must include every aspect of Christian life. It must therefore provide a human, cultural, spiritual and pastoral preparation which pays special attention to the harmonious integration of all its various aspects."³

In *The Acting Person*, Karol Wojtyla argues that integration, which "assembles

component parts so as to make a whole,” is achieved only through acts of self-possession, self-governance and self-gift.⁴ The integrated person is able to give the self generously to others. In contrast, the disintegrated person remains incapable of the generous self-donation required by Christian vocation. Since the electronic age is introducing new components that provide unprecedented challenges to human integration, it is essential for formators to understand what is new in the experience of the contemporary person seeking to be formed. It follows that formators also need to develop new strategies to help persons achieve personal integration so crucial to living their vocation well.

Classical Teaching about Relaxation and Recreation

Thomas Aquinas says in the *Summa Theologica*: “Now this relaxation of the mind from work consists in playful words or deeds. Therefore, it becomes a wise and virtuous man to have recourse to such things at times. Moreover, the Philosopher [Aristotle] assigns to games, the virtue of... *pleasantness*”.⁵ A. G. Sertillanges, follows Thomas’s line of argument in *The Intellectual Life* to support recreational breaks from the intense life of study and prayer:

Relaxation is a duty, like hygiene in which it is included, like the conservation of energy. “I pray thee, spare thyself at times,” said St. Augustine to his disciple (De Musica, c.II)... [S]ince the world of sense is our connatural setting, and since all the little practical actions form the web of the life we are adapted for, one cannot leave that lower sphere and rise up to the abstract without some fatigue. The effort cannot be continuous. We must come back to nature and plunge into it in order to recover our energy.”⁶

Why do some people return from times of relaxation and recreation refreshed while others return with more fatigue than invigoration? To answer this question we need to consider to what extent uses of electric technologies contribute to fatigue?

The critique of the ~~eternal~~ return of fatigue is not meant to devalue videos, internet, cyberspace technologies, or electronic music per se. The challenge for formators is to help the person in formation develop commensurate strengths of intellect and will, so that he or she will have dominion over electronic technologies. What must be overcome is the situation in which a particular electronic technology has dominion over a person in formation.

When does electronic media help^s relaxation and recreation? When what is communicated has a meaning that attracts our higher personal faculties of intellect, will, and heart; when it evokes a release of the natural passions of pity and fear through what Aristotle called “its catharsis of such emotions.”⁷ when it draws forth laughter by good humour; when it inspires acts of virtue to build the common good; or when it increases love for our vocation. In these situations a person acts in response to the sense phantasms conveyed through the technological media.

It is obvious that technology has some very positive uses in formation. A good video can be a true source of individual relaxation and of communal recreation. A television news program can open the mind and heart to pray for real situations in the world, and a video game may genuinely relax a tired mind. Internet access opens many avenues for research and for continuity of good friendships. These personal actions involve higher levels of response than merely sensations that simply happen in the person. Karol Wojtyla describes in *The Acting Person* how a human being’s mirroring capacity of consciousness enables him to “draw a strict distinction between his acting and everything that only takes place or happens in his ego.”⁸

Traditionally a variety of activities provided the framework for much needed relaxation

and recreation for seminarians, priests, religious, and lay Catholics. Sertillanges summarizes some of these traditional options:

St. Thomas explains that the true rest of the soul is joy, some activity in which we delight. Games, familiar conversation, friendship, family life, pleasant reading..., communion with nature, some art accessible to us, some not tiring manual work, and intelligent stroll..., theatrical performances..., sport in moderation: these are our means of relaxation.⁹

The recent phenomenon in which electronic forms of relaxation and recreation produce fatigue rather than refreshment and joy will now be analyzed from two different perspectives: first with respect to the form of electronic media and second with respect to the contents of electronic media. Then to conclude this article, various strategies for contemporary formation will be suggested.

Forms of Electronic Media and Implosion of the Senses

Marshall McLuhan, a convert to Catholicism, professor of English literature at St. Louis and Fordham Universities, and Director of the Center for Technology and Culture at the University of Toronto is credited with first bringing to the world's attention the effect of electronic technology on the unsuspecting viewer.

In a well-known chapter entitled "The medium is the message"¹⁰ McLuhan refers to a 1950 quotation from Pope Pius XII encouraging a serious study of media, including "techniques of communication and the capacity of the individual's own reaction."¹¹ While communications media in past centuries, including such examples as the printed book, cable, or telephone all extended a person's sight, hearing, or touch outwards, contemporary

communications media implodes inwards on the same senses. As McLuhan summarizes it:
“After three thousand years of explosion, by means of fragmentary and mechanical technologies, the Western world is imploding.”¹²

The experience of constant exposure to television, videos, internet surfing, and video-games have transformed the senses and minds of the men and women seeking to be formed in Christian vocation. McLuhan observes: “In television, images are projected at you. You are the screen. The images wrap around you. You are the vanishing point.”¹³

A constant use of such media as forms of individual relaxation or communal recreation can also foster a fatigue and dullness in the life of the person. McLuhan noted that the tendency towards excessive use of electronic media appeared to follow from the forms of electronic media themselves:

The urge to continuous use is quite independent of the “content” of public programs or of the private sense life, being testimony to the fact that technology is part of our bodies. Electric technology is directly related to our central nervous systems... Once we have surrendered our senses and nervous systems to the private manipulations of those who would try to benefit from taking a lease on our eyes and ears and nerves, we don’t really have any rights left.¹⁴

Fatigue and dullness may be explained as following from the second of four laws of media identified by McLuhan: “the attendant ‘closure’: because there is equilibrium in sensibility, when one area of experience is heightened or intensified, another is diminished or numbed”¹⁵

Thomas Aquinas delineated not only external senses, but also internal senses as well as the higher powers of the soul. McLuhan’s second law of media could explain a closure of capacities in memorative, imaginative, estimative, powers as well as the higher powers of intellect and will. Hugh McDonald summarizes this feature:

Present communication technologies supplant man's external senses, and more recently, the internal senses of imagination and the most important, the central or common sense, which brings the various data of the external senses together into a cohesive unity. The world of information, however, conceived, may appear to exist in its own right by means of electronics, and the human user becomes a mere participant in that world. This involves a process that Marshall McLuhan called auto-amputation.¹⁶

If one of the central goals of formation is to help a person become integrated, then it is clear that the interruption or "auto-amputation" of the power of common sense which coordinates the lower powers of the soul in relation to a higher end could have serious consequences.

McLuhan often states that overstimulation of one or more senses through extensive use of electronic media may implode back on the person anesthetizing other internal powers:

If a technology is introduced either from within or from without a culture, and if it gives new stress or ascendancy to one or another of our senses, the ratio among all of our senses is altered. We no longer feel the same, nor do our eyes and ears and other senses remain the same. The interplay among our senses is perpetual save in conditions of anesthesia. But any sense when stepped up to high intensity can act as an anesthetic for the other senses."¹⁷

McLuhan realized that the television screen is made of several million dots like an ancient mosaic. The rapidly changing number of images which filled the television screen made of several million dots per second forces the viewer to pull them constantly together.

Neither black and white nor color television is a picture. It is an X-ray. Light comes through the image at the viewer; the viewer is not a camera, but a screen. The TV camera has no shutter but works like a shifting mosaic. Totally different from photographs and movies, the TV image is discontinuous and flat.¹⁸

This effort in the viewer to provide continuity to what is discontinuous may also contribute to increased fatigue. Just consider contemporary news programs with its screen divided into segmented sections which themselves are in constant motion. Therefore, since the form of the

television screen and its content are in constant motion, the spatial and temporal need to establish continuity becomes ever more pronounced, unless the viewer simply gives up and leaves the discontinuities in place. As McLuhan observes: "The TV thing itself is very, very polluting. It goes right into the nervous system... Well, when things change at very high speeds, a need for continuity develops. You see, you're in such a complete discontinuity at high speed. Everything you're looking at now is gone in a second ..." ¹⁹

Marshall McLuhan's observations in the 1960's are even more important today, when the forms of electronic media have increased many-fold in both speed and discontinuity. Is there anything more poignant than elderly religious in a retirement home lined up in chairs passively watching television for hours or a priest who, alone in a rectory, passively sits before a television seeking an illusive refreshment? Electronic media thus presses formators to discover effective means to help seminarians and young religious to develop an integrated internal unity of life which will provide essential continuity of purpose even when external forms of relaxation and recreation lack these features.

Distinguishing Sense Stimuli from Spiritual Realities

When considering the books he read, St. Ignatius of Loyola developed criteria for discerning the difference between sense experiences which gave immediate pleasure, but left him feeling empty afterwards, and spiritual experiences which also gave him initial pleasure, but remained filling him with joy.²⁰ Karol Wojtyla similarly distinguishes between "excitement [which] as such remains indicative of the sphere of sensuous stimuli or stimulations...[and] elation, ...[which is] spiritual in nature."²¹ People whose senses are

stimulated by vivid images or sounds experience excitement during the time the images 'happen in them.' Many emotions may also be stimulated at the same time --- emotions of pleasure, desire, aversion, love and even hatred. Excitement is also associated with bodily responses such as rapid heart beat, breathing, etc. Elation, on the other hand, is the joy or delight which accompanies a spiritual act such as an intellectual discovery of truth, a gift of the Spirit during times of prayer, or delight in performing an act of charity. It accompanies human acts of the highest faculties, of intellect and will.

In *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities* St. Edith Stein, when considering artificial stimulants, distinguishes two states of consciousness, one which she calls 'feverishness' and another which she calls 'vigor'. Her distinction accords perfectly to what we are seeking concerning two different effects of recreation:

First of all, we take up the condition of 'super-alertness' or 'feverishness' as it comes on perhaps with high stimulation... When such a condition sets in, the experiencing starts to oscillate rapidly and it reaches the utmost degree of tension. ...Consciousness is wakeful and bright, and the contents exhibit the luminosity of full aliveness. Yet it is not vigor that evokes this aliveness. Vigor is like a steadily flowing fountain from which strong, serene waves of experience are billowing. Feverishness is like a restless geyser that drives the current of experiencing onward.²²

Anyone who has observed the self or others in the midst of a video game, watching a dramatic video and breaking news, or surfing the internet, can relate to this description of feverishness that pushes one to play 'just one more game', to make 'just one more search', to watch 'just one more program' before turning back to the school work at hand or taking well needed sleep.

Stein continues with her acute phenomenological analysis to unfold two different effects of the experiences of feverishness and vigor:

✗ Vigor, when it has played for awhile in the flow of experience, goes over into a wholesome tiredness that allows the current to slacken and shut itself off against external influences. Feverishness is followed by exhaustion, which isn't any beneficial relaxation; something of the restlessness of the fever reverberates in the exhaustion; a painful convulsing that cannot come to repose. That elevated sensitivity that we mentioned before prevails here. Impressions do not simply glide off; they don't remain flat as they do with tiredness, nor are they picked up effortlessly and joyfully. Rather, they barge into the defenceless consciousness and hurt it.²³

How is the defenceless ego harmed? Stein observes that when the experience has been one of feverish stimulation of the senses:

The experiencing no longer oscillates rapidly, but slackens as with all weariness. However, it is not shut off against impressions. You wouldn't call it receptive, but only incapable of shutting itself off against the impressions. The awareness of this almost compulsory experiencing is a heightened one, but differs from that of exerted experience through this, that the latter sort of awareness easily goes over into a reflection, that is, into a witnessing demeanor with respect to "what's happening in me." The contents of experience (experienced as intruding) are clearly and distinctly salient, but all are afflicted with an insipid aftertaste, contrary to the condition of vigor or of feverishness.²⁴

St. Edith Stein mentions above two further dangers that face persons who seek these heightened experiences of sensitivity: their potential to be compulsory and self-deluding. Formators are also becoming increasingly aware of new problems that face seminarians, priests, religious, and laity of addiction to television, internet, headline news, or video games. These problems also face those who have been living as priests or religious for many years. Men or women who are caught in these compulsions and/ or self-delusions usually believe that they are not harming anyone. However, "this enhancement of experiencing can appear to us straight away as a heightening of life, and can delude us about the 'true' condition in which we find ourselves."²⁵

If persons share the above compulsion and delusion with others, they may think that

they are building relationships. However, if they are simply isolated egos living in the same building, they may very well be alienating themselves from others, becoming alienated from the self, from the work of their study and prayer, from the mission of their vocation, and from the God whom they want to serve with all their heart.

Therefore, ^{common} communal forms of recreation also need to be encouraged by formators in which several persons work together for the common good. The key is active participation by persons so that multiple experiences are provided that differ from the passive experience of electronic media. Constructing a living area, preparing and sharing meals, singing together or playing musical instruments together, making recordings with hi-tech mixing boards, or producing dramas with technological effects can also be excellent forms of community recreation for those who have talents to share in these areas. Over time, the skill of good judgment about practical means to achieve a good end for an individual person or community will improve.

A formator needs to provide situations in which a person can discover the difference between excitement caused by sensations and elation caused by the Holy Spirit, between 'feverishness' that accompanies one kind of activity and 'vigor' that accompanies another kind of activity. Once a person knows the difference and has an appetite for spiritually beneficial forms of prayer, relaxation, and recreation, then further practical exercises can be developed which will enhance the spiritual life for which these persons are being formed.

Many diocesan seminarians, religious, and lay persons today are also often right in the midst of the world while they are in formation. Therefore, it is incumbent upon formators to provide multiple strategies to help the person in formation to actualize their ego so that it can

truly be a pivot of self-knowledge, self-governance, and self-gift to Christ, and through Christ to others.

Content of Electronic Media Implodes Within the Person

When does the content of electric media harm relaxation and recreation? When it provides stimulating images that evoke strong natural passions without any meaning; or when the intensity of these images provoke in the viewer the passions of fear, desire, anger, aversion, sorrow, or pleasure without an integrating context, or even more, with a disintegrating purpose or message. These experiences do not relax or refresh the mind. They absorb much mental energy because they keep rising in the memory and imagination begging for some integration from the person who is now seeking to pray, study, sleep, or concentrate on something else.

Problems especially for those in formation for a Christian vocation, of integrating repeated images of violence, graphic sexual acts, and blasphemous or vulgar language have become acute recently because of the content of regular television programming, news programs, and internet sites. Cable television allows strong electronic images to enter into the living rooms and bed rooms of people who previously would have rarely, if ever, have encountered them. The script writers are their hidden formators.

Furthermore, electronic news media or advertisers often repeat interminably the same graphic images. This phenomenon of rapid stimulation of the senses of sight, hearing, and touch by constant repetition of electronically created sensations is new. Video games, repeating over and again violent or sexual images seemingly controlled by touch, also enter as phantasms

one seminar: to let me be
into the conscious life of the person in formation, who lose half of an hour of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament just trying to get video game images out of his mind. The senses ironically implode back on the very person who had used them in a particular way to over come fatigue in the first place. They also evoke intense passions that seem to invade the person's life. Here, where content is concerned, the passions or emotions themselves become the difficulty for the person in formation. Seeking continuously to bury the passions of sexual desire, fear, hatred, and so on, he or she experiences again the ~~eternal~~ return of fatigue.

Karol Wojtyla suggests that 'the emotionalization of consciousness' offers a particular challenge to integration:

The emotionalization of consciousness begins when the image of the meanings of the particular emotive instances and of objects they are related to fades in consciousness, so that the feelings may outgrow their current understanding by man. This is practically tantamount to a **breakdown of self-knowledge**; for consciousness, without ceasing to mirror the emotive distances just as they come, loses its controlling, that is to say, its objective attitude toward them.²⁶

Formation must help the person who experiences the emotionalization of consciousness to develop careful self-knowledge about how various kinds of electronic media affect him or her. Persons vary and will not all have the same reactions to either the form or content of different electronic media. Leaving aside for a moment those contents simply incompatible with Christian life, self-knowledge is the first hinge for further formation.

Wojtyla argues further that when self-knowledge ceases to have its proper objectivity: "Man then only experiences his emotions and allows them to dwell in him according to their own primitive forms of subjectivity, but does not experience them subjectively in a way that would bring out the person's ego as the true pivot of experience."²⁷ Formation must aim also

at helping a person become self-possessed in spiritual combat and the aesthetical life. For this to be achieved, a person's ego must become a true pivot of his or her experience.

Wojtyla concludes his analysis of the detrimental effects of the emotionalization of consciousness by the chilling observation that it inhibits the actualization of the person: "The emotionalization of consciousness obstructs or even prevents its (the personal ego's) proper actualization."²⁸ Thus, it would interfere with the development of full self-governance as essential to the life of Christian virtue within a priestly, religious, or lay vocation.

Strategies for Countering Implosion of the Senses

In the final part of this article, particular strategies will be offered to formators for fostering growth in each of the three areas noted immediately above: self-knowledge, self-possession, and self-governance. They will consider ways in which traditional spiritual principles can be applied in the new formational context created by both the form and the content of electronic media.

Forming self-knowledge in an electronic age

John Henry Newman, in Sermon 4 "On Secret Faults" begins with this observation:

Strange as it may seem, multitudes called Christians go through life with no effort to obtain a correct knowledge of themselves. They are contented with general and vague impressions concerning their real state; and, if they have more than this, it is merely such accidental information about themselves as the events of life force upon them. But exact systematic knowledge they have none, and do not aim at it.²⁹

He offers several insights which can help a person come to greater self knowledge.

Among those are two that particularly relate to our topic of excessive desire for electronic

media: 1) with the force of habit in making bad choices the more we ignore our conscience “it soon ceases to upbraid us;” and 2) every age has its customs and wrong ways, “and that these have such influence, that even good men, from living in the world, are unconsciously misled by them.”³⁰

Forming persons toward greater self-knowledge involves providing a framework to help him or her to step back from an experience and evaluate it. This ‘stepping back from the self’ can be aided by some kind of charting either during or after an experience of electronic media. The goal is to help the person in formation become more aware of his or her individual response to particular choices of relaxation. Responses vary with personalities and background, so it is crucial for the person to understand how he or she is specifically effected by electronic media.

One kind of chart could focus on the kind of electronic media experienced and consider its effect on study, work, prayer, or relations with others. A second kind of chart could focus more on the content of the electronic media and consider its effects study, work, prayer, or relations with others. The purpose of these charts is to help the person become aware of how he or she is personally affected by electronic media in relation to his vocational call. They could be shared with a formator as a basis for growing in self-knowledge.

Forming self-possession in an electronic age

In an internet article entitled “Asceticism and the Electronic Media: Technophilia and Technophobia in the Perspective of Christian Philosophy” Hugh McDonald observes that “The

most dangerous attitude is that of one who sits in front of a television set ^{or} of computer terminal without a critical attitude. Since the machine is on, he takes up a passive and receptive stance. The Christian practices of fasting and abstinence are perhaps easy compared with consciously limiting our use of the media, yet that is required for mental and moral health."³¹

How does a formator encourage someone to take up a critical attitude in relation to his or her own relation to electronic media? One possibility might be to create with the person in formation a new kind of examination of consciousness that might some of the following questions about the content of the experience.

1. **Am I an electronic 'Peeping Person'?** ^{Tame} Even though I do not lurk in the shadows looking into the windows in private homes, do I get perverse pleasure by watching scenes that are erotic and by their intimate nature should be private?
2. **Am I an electronic 'Voyeur'?** Do I live through other people's experiences on reality shows as a substitute for the life I should be leading myself?
3. **Am I an electronic 'Curious Addict'?** Do I have to follow every step of a televised trial or media event employing my intellect towards sensible matters that are not useful?
4. **Am I an electronic 'Busy-body'?** Do I eagerly listen to gossip on talk shows or in news casts so that I can pass it on to others?
5. **Am I an electronic 'Stalker'?** Do I have to see every appearance of particular actor or hear every recording of a particular person or group as a way to possess another's identity for myself?

examination of conscience
Another example might be to examine how the content of a particular experience of electronic media contravenes one of the ten commandments with respect to killing, adultery, taking the name of God in vain, and so on. The person could consider how his or her self-possession is affected by graphic depiction of sexual relations or video games include repeated violent tactile and visual experiences of killing?

Peter Kreeft in Back to Virtue makes an observation that is poignant for our study:

If we can conquer everything except our selves, the result is that we do not hold the power. More and more power over nature is placed in hands that are weaker and

weaker. Heredity, environment, the spirit of the times, “the inevitable dialectic of history”, the media --- something is always in the driver’s seat instead of ourselves.³²

It is clear that those in the driver’s seat of electronic media are often not Christians. Nor are they even following even basic principles of natural law. The sensible images they convey are often not permeated by the spirit of God, but instead, are increasingly pagan. Persons or imaginary characters depicted are attracted to vice and serious sin.

What kinds of vices and sins do people in formation themselves have with respect to electronic media? We noted three particular characteristics that extensive use of electronic media seemed to have: ~~eternal~~ return of fatigue, and a tendency towards compulsion, and self-delusion. Using traditional vocabulary for capital sins, new forms of sloth and gluttony can be identified.

Garrigou LaGrange states that:

Spiritual sloth, disgust for the spiritual things and for the work of sanctification, because of the effort it demands, is a vice directly opposed to the love of God and to the holy joy that results from it. Sloth engenders... pusillanimity in the face of duty to be accomplished, discouragement, ... seeking after forbidden things.³³

In another example, a person may wonder why gluttony is chosen as a capital sin associated with compulsion to use electronic media for relaxation or recreation. Traditionally, gluttony is associated with food. ^{rd. d} St. Thomas says that gluttony is an inordinate desire of eating and drinking, this desire for food not being regulated by reason.³⁴ There are many in formation who have an inordinate desire to use the electronic media for relaxation and recreation. They feed themselves with electronic data until they are satiated. This is indeed a new form of gluttony. Christian life has always been a struggle to overcome the tendency

towards sin. Garrigou-Lagrange identifies various consequences of leaving disorder in the soul: “gluttony...engenders: improper jokes, buffoonery, impurity, foolish conversation, stupidity.”³⁵

The formator may be able to use humour to help the seminarian or young religious to see how they are falling into ancient patterns of the “deadly sins” with new forms of electronic media. For example, with the person, the formator could create a phrase or anagram that will help them develop new aesthetical practices. By recognizing in advance when they have “caught an electronic virus” called “elect-me-glut” (gluttony of electronic media), “tech-me-glut” (gluttony of technological media), or “spiri-loth” (sloth in spiritual things), the person in formation can make new acts of will to increase self-possession in an electronic age.

Forming Self-Governance in an Electronic Age

Each person’s conscience acts like a motion sensitive light. It goes on when the person is considering with the practical intellect the moral quality of an act done in the past, being done in the present, or being considered for the future.³⁶ Conscience guides the practical intellect in a person who acts. The Catechism (#1839) teaches that “The moral virtues grow through education, deliberate acts, and perseverance in struggle. Divine grace purifies and elevates them.” A self-governed person is a virtuous person in the Christian sense.³⁷

To grow in temperance is to learn how to moderate the attraction of the pleasure of the senses to use created goods in a balanced way to develop chastity and purity of heart. Clearly this virtue has a place in the new evangelization of the use of technological media. In a practical way, a person can moderate both how much electronic media is used and how he or

she engages with it when it is used. A quick response during a video using the mute button, the fast forward, of leaving a room when images and sounds awaken intense passions of concupiscence, anger, or hatred can develop the virtue of temperance. A person in formation could choose certain liturgical times, such as Fridays, Advent, or Lent to abstain from a particular form or content of electronic media as a way of fasting. In doing so, he or she will increasingly broaden and deepen the domain of self-governance. In addition, charity can be fostered through offering up of difficult acts of electronic fasting for the good of others.

The virtue of Fortitude helps when suffering or difficulty is experienced in continuing to exercise responsibility towards Christian life by purifying the senses. Here a person could choose to ride in a car without turning on the radio, stay in a motel without turning on the television, resist watching a video if some of his or her friends are watching it, or miss a news cast in a given day or week. If at a particular time outside of liturgical seasons of fasting and abstinence these simple acts are very difficult, then a simple act of self denial, offering of disappointment, and suffering for another person who is addicted to electronic media can build up the virtue of fortitude and build the common good through a silent act of charity.

The virtue of Justice renders to God what is due to Him. Since the person in formation owes his or her life and vocation to His grace and love, they could choose to purify the memory in a particular time by filling it with spiritual realities that are good, true, beautiful, and build unity in the self and among communities of persons by other means than electronic media. The struggle to live the virtuous life is difficult. Dom Lorenzo Scupoli, in *The Spiritual Combat* suggests: “When an agreeable object is presented to the senses, do not become absorbed in its material elements, but let the understanding judge it.”³⁸ When listening to or

seeing something very beautiful, silent praise can be offered to God. If blasphemy occurs, silent reparation can be made. A person can directly relate to the content of the blasphemy by silent words such as: “Praised be the name of Jesus”, “Glory to God”, “Christ be before me,” and so on. When characters on television or videos blaspheme, then reparation can be made for the person who wrote the script. Little acts of worship like these develop the virtue of justice.

Prudence, or practical wisdom, will develop over time as the person in formation becomes increasingly self-governed by choices of the proper means to achieve the good of his or her vocation. Prudence involves knowing both the general principle and the proper way to apply it in a given situation. If the formator can teach a seminarian, young religious, or lay Christian how to develop the virtue of prudence with respect to the use of electronic media, then that person should be able later on in life to continue making good choices. Prudence, as the mother of all the other virtues, is the “perfected ability to make right decisions.”³⁹ Like a parent, the formator can not anticipate all the future situations that will face the person being formed, but he or she can hope to lead persons in formation to a true integration of the principles taught so that they can make their own right decisions as situations arise.

Considering the radical changes that electronic media have brought into the world in the last 40 years since Marshall McLuhan first began studying its effects, it is reasonable to expect that equally radical changes will confront Catholics in times ahead. As Cardinal Newman asks: “Many things are against us, it is plain. Yet is not our future prize worth a struggle?”⁴⁰

1. With gratitude for suggestions for the revision of this paper by seminarians Stephen Szutenbach and Dan Waldeck, Fr. Dennis Dinan, Sr. Mary Judith O'Brien, and faculty of St. John Vianney Theological Seminary, Denver.
2. I will use the word 'relaxation' to refer to a single person and 'recreation' to refer to a group of persons who relax together.
3. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), #65. See also, John Paul II, Post-Synodal Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis* (On the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day) (Quebec: Editions Paulines, 1992) #8-10 and 42-69; and for lay formation see also, John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1988), #59.
4. Wojtyla, *The Acting Person* (Dordrecht: Holland: D. Reidel, 1979), 191-193.
5. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, 1, " (1948), 5 vols. Pt. II, IIae, Q 168, art 2. sed. contra.
6. A.G. Sertillanges, O.P. *The Intellectual Life: Its Spirits, Conditions, and Methods* (Washington DC: Catholic University Press, 1987), 243.
7. Aristotle, "The Poetics," in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1970), 1449b 28.
8. Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, 48.
9. Sertillanges, *The Intellectual Life*, 246.
10. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: Signet Books, 1964), chapter 1, 23-35. See also Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* (New York: Bantam, 1967), 26. The use of the word 'massage' here is intentional for McLuhan because he believed that "electric technology created the mass.", 68.
11. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 34.
12. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 19.
13. Ibid., 125. See also, Marshall McLuhan and Harley Parker, *Through the Vanishing Point: Space in Poetry and Painting* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 266.
14. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 73.
15. Marshall and Eric McLuhan, *Laws of Media: The New Science* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, ----), viii. See also McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 56.

How get students to internalize it.

...read by taking breaks -

33. R. Garrigou Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, (St. Louis: Herder Book Co., 1947), vol.I, 303.
34. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, Q. 148.
35. Garrigou Lagrange, *Three Ages*, I, 321.
36. See Sr. Prudence Allen, "Where is Our Conscience?," forthcoming *International Philosophical Quarterly* (September 2004).
37. See for example, Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues* (Notre Dame Indiana: Notre Dame Press, 1966) and Roman Cessario, O.P. *The Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame Press, 1991), especially chapter 4' Prudence and the Moral Virtues.
38. Dom Lorenzo Scupoli, *The Spiritual Combat* (Rockford, Illinois: Tan Books and Publishers, 1990), 66.
39. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 6.
40. Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, 37-38.

gluttony - + video-games
adrenaline rush - chemical?

↳ Serotonin
not chemical
depressive / capabilties

behavior reinforcement -
gluttony - body / art -

Tan / Form / ^{medium} color / ^{high} power - TV / ^{Hi-tech} media

content - increase - diminish +

// + drugs - experience sensation
no content - no connect with other persons.
↑ injuries.

/ quality should be higher

Anthony

Son Moir cause or how to decipher media.
ministry of the word.

subtle attacks how to become

Go. what is difference? re. vacate not being / entire.

gluttony

Dark night of Soul.

Catechism (un-satisfying) where no
"St John of the Cross" caused ch.

↳ consuming / religious things / →

punishment of
involuntary gluttony - difficult -
in previous life - have long term effects -
→ deeper prayer life - //

The media can be considered
alien of form things - which
the cult is given. Visions
of color (Serotonin) - affects
young children.

like n. tent
light -
Soul in "new concepts"
Overexposure / stimulation
at no
series

Higher
Screens.

fun
Cult
gluttony -
re-awaken
new form
from form

meets
into
form
(feel parts)

fun
Cult
gluttony -
re-awaken
new form
from form